

July 8, 1969

Dr. Lawrence Okun
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Dear Larry,

If Gan has been in touch with you since your letter I hope he will have been able to communicate better information about the very high esteem that I have for him and his confident understanding about our plans for his promotion during the next cycle. It is the old story of presumed communication. I thought I had made these matters absolutely clear to him and they were so self-evidently reasonable that I could not imagine any possibility of his doubt about it. But on important matters one can never repeat the fact often enough.

I very much appreciate the spirit of your remarks about Gan and even more about yourself.

I don't know why you should be self-critical about the unease you express about the human condition. Less perceptive or less intelligent people may be able to suppress their concerns or escape them in one way or another but if you want to call them "adolescent" I have to jump into the same category myself, regardless.

That we do share so much in our world outlook is one reason that I am very eager to find a way for you to come back here if only to find some strength in mutual commiseration. But I have much more in mind than that. I am only afraid that if I stress one specific proposal that you may take it too seriously when in fact I could happily foresee any one of a number of alternatives depending in large measure on your own predilections. I am working on the possibility of offering you a faculty appointment but before trying to firm this up I think we should come to a more definite understanding of the kind of role you might like to try out. I am not in a position to make a definite offer along these lines just yet but I can unequivocally offer you the opportunity of coming here at any time with an interim appointment and with a comfortable salary and working facilities.

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What crosses my mind as the most appropriate would be for you to come here and spend approximately half of your time on research of your own choosing, by no means excluding the kind of molecular biology in which we share a direct interest. For the rest of your time I would like you to help us to organize and co-ordinate the program in human biology of which I sent you a very general prospectus and also to work with me on trying to find routes by which to answer the kind of questions that are outlined on the attached sheet (part of an informal application for some funds). I think we have to do more than just bemoan the problem of the intellectual and get on to doing something about whatever contribution we can make towards helping to straighten out the world and the roles that individuals can play in relation to it. I don't have a clear enough picture to be able to recommend and try to implement any particular institutional structure but the university is certainly sufficiently flexible to be able to do very many different things and the development of this new human biology program would only extend that capability. Not least of all there are very good odds of getting some very useful funds to help support new projects.

I hope some of these suggestions may be on the right track but whether or not, please do give me your reactions to them.

Our work with chlorine and DNA is still too indecisive to write simply about it. There is no question but that chloramine reacts with and inactivates transforming DNA and we are still chasing down the chemical aspects of that reaction. Margerie Shaw is going to look at chromosome breakage in cell culture and Evelyn Witkin has a tentative collaboration of the mutagenicity of hypochloride in *E. coli*. The public health issues are going to rest mainly on the transport of chlorinated intermediates to the intact animal.

I agree with you about Wicker and Reston. Edna will get your message about the columns.

All the best.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Enclosure
JL/rr